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NET EVALUATION SUBCOMMITTEE STAFF

5 March 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: NIE 11-56: Soviet Gross Capabilities for Attack on US
and Key Overseas Installations Through 1959

1. To accomplish the mission assigned to it by the President, the Net Evaluation Subcommittee requires, inter alia, an estimate of the most likely size and composition of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force as of mid-1959. NIE 11-56 is designed to meet that requirement. The only figures given in response to it are those in the table in paragraph 9 of the present draft. However, the State footnote on the Foreword, with which Army and Navy are said to be associated, asserts that a radically different estimate would be equally probable. If this is accepted as true, the NFEC will be left, in practical effect, with no IAC response to its requirement. If the table in paragraph 9 is not, in order of magnitude, the IAC's best estimate, as of March 1956, regarding the most likely size and composition of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force, as of mid-1959, what is?

2. I consider that the figures given in paragraph 9 are in fact the most likely for mid-1959 and that there is no other equal likelihood, although there are obviously other possibilities. This is not merely because the figures given are the Air Force estimate, although the Air Force's primary responsibility in this field should receive due weight. There is evidence that the USSR is making a major effort to develop a more effective Long-Range Air Force, and that the number of regiments in that Force is actually increasing, not decreasing. In the face of this evidence, and without any evidence whatever to contrary effect, it seems to me untenable to suppose, as does State, that the USSR would abandon this effort, just as it was reaching fruition, in consideration of the possibility of achieving an effective guided missile capability at an uncertain future date. The IAC representatives, State excepted, all concurred in this judgment.

3. It appears to me that the State representative confuses probability with possibility, and that he fails to comprehend that

JOB NO. 79R00904A

BOX NO. 3

Approved For Release 2000/08/29 : CIA-RDP79R00904A000300010004-3

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DOCUMENT NO. 4
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐
☒ DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C
NEXT REVIEW DATE:
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 12-9-60 REVIEWER: 018645

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the instant requirement is for an estimate of greatest likelihood, the best that can be made in present circumstances, with full knowledge that there are other possibilities.

b. If the IAC is unable to provide an estimate of the most likely size and composition of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force as of mid-1959, the WFSC will be obliged to use the Air Force estimate. For practical purposes, the WFSC requires a definite estimate. It cannot use State's abstract language.

5. I recommend:

a. That the Foreword be deleted, as not only of no service, but actually a disservice to the requestor.

b. That the issue be squarely faced whether the figures in paragraph 9 are, or are not, the best estimate the IAC can make, on the basis of present evidence, regarding the most likely size and composition of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force in mid-1959.

c. That, if it is concluded that paragraph 9 does not provide such an estimate, the IAC proceed to provide one, as a matter of urgency, in response to the requestor's request.


WFSC Staff

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